

Referential Relation in Wittgenstein's Theory of Language (Tractatus, Philosophical Investigations)

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Let us remember Wittgenstein's main assertions in *Tractatus*. As everyone knows Wittgenstein suggests a theory of language called "picture theory", according to which every word names an object or every word represents something. The proposition in *Tractatus* concerned with this idea is "A name means an object. The object is its meaning" (3.203).

Accepting that every name is to be the name of something to which it refers, then it becomes clear that there is no word or name which does not refer to an object. So this view becomes intelligible when the whole domain of language is thought to be consisting of names or nouns as *Tractatus* itself supposes. Here as one may realise though we are aware of that the object to which a name refers is the meaning of the name, we do not contemplate the relation of a name to an object as the relation or reference of a name to a "meaning" just for not presenting a third constituent for this relation. As one may recognise the notion of referential relation¹ has already slipped into our arguments. Now it seems reasonable to point out that there is a referential relation between a name and what a name stands for or refers to. In other words naming activity necessitates a referential relation between a name and an object. However such a referential relation between a name and an object can be made clear by means of examining each part of this relation.

To consider the first part of this relation, it can be said that to name is to name something, in other words a name is the name of something. That is to say every name supposes a relation in which the representation of something in some way is unavoidable. In order to be able to talk about a name we have an inevitable reference or relation to what is non-name or an object. Without a reference to an object it is impossible to speak of a naming activity. The act of naming is always going to be the act of naming something or an object. Where an act of naming is supposed, the existence of an object to be named is also supposed.

Now if we consider the nature of such a referential relation between a language and an object from the object part, then we can say that in the referential relation of languages, there is always an object to be named or to be referred to. Conceivably, when there is no something to be named, then the act of naming becomes unintelligible. If there is no an object to be named, then the act of naming, if correct, would not exist at all. For if there is an object to be named, then the act of naming, which may be thought to be in a referential relation to the object, will become understandable. To use another method for the clarification of the view, it can be said that if the object is the meaning of the word, suppose that there is not an object to be named it means there is no an act of naming either due to that an act of naming must have a meaning. An act of naming without a meaning would not mean much, for Wittgenstein. For Wittgenstein every name must have a meaning simply by depending upon the existence of an object to which it has a referential relation. So the elimination of the object from this referential relation will

mean that the language that we use will not have any meaning. Given an example, let us have the word "ofsu" in mind, if there is not an object which corresponds to this word, then we cannot talk of an act of naming an object which is called "ofsu", simply because the meaning of the word "ofsu" and that of related act of naming is missing. To have a meaningful language means to have a language domain where each name or word is in a referential relation to an object, which is the meaning of the language used, as to *Tractatus*.

In addition to having names which does not refer to an object such as "ofsu", we can also take some attention on the cases where some names refer to objects² which do not exist. The round square, unicorn and similar names attempts to name things which do not exist. So how is this possible, if possible, on what ground could they be accepted as having a meaning, it still remains questionable on the part of Wittgenstein.

So far we have tried to show that there is a referential relation which is describable in *Tractatus*. But now by following a similar line of reasoning we will attempt to clarify that there is also a referential relation which one may describe in *Philosophical Investigations*. At this point let us recall the main assertions of Later Wittgenstein concerning the theory of language: later theory of meaning has a claim of defining language in a different way. First of all the language is not to be conceived of as the name of a single phenomenon or some phenomenon, as claimed in *Tractatus*. Such a definition supposes the use of words as only names. But Wittgenstein believes, this is a mistaken notion of language. For, besides that a word can be used as a name, it can also be used in numerous other ways too. There are other domains of language where many different words are used in many different ways. From these remarks we possibly come to the recognition of the fact that Wittgenstein needs to present to us a different theory and definition of language by which a limitation to proper names would be unnecessary. From the fact that even the names themselves can mean in many ways Wittgenstein finds himself in a need of defining language in a different way. In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein writes; "For a large class of cases-though not for all in which we employ the word 'meaning', it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (PI. §43(P.20^e)). By this definition of language Wittgenstein introduces a new notion to the field of language. This is, namely, the language-game. What is a language-game? According to Wittgenstein, a language-game is a "whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven" (Ibid §7(P.5^e)). It can be said that it is the language-game by which the use of a certain word in a certain way is made possible. When a word is used in a certain way, there is a related language-game in which the word gains a distinguishing meaning. Before pointing to the way by which a word gains a meaning, let us remember, Wittgenstein's own words: "Here the term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that speaking of language is part of an activity, or a form of

¹ As becomes clear, throughout this paper I will use the terms "relation", "reference", "referential relation" interchangeably.

² Here the term "object" can be replaced by the term "entity" for a better understanding of the case.

life " Ibid §23(P.11^e). Simply what he says is that the language-games are expressions of people's form of life or mode of activity. So the definition of language turns out to be that when a word is used in a certain way, it is also used in relation to a related human action. This is to say that words used are to reflect some human actions, which are found in a form of life. There is always a social context in which a word is used in a certain manner, and this social context relates us to a human action undeniably. This clarifies that when a word is used in a certain way for gaining a meaning, this use of word or language-game always is in a relation to a human action into which, as Wittgenstein holds, the word is woven.

As becomes clear, different language-games brings us into a connection with different human actions or mode of activities. For such language-games, let us take an example; the word " die " used in a battle by a commander will relate us to the defined human action of attacking and taking all the risks for winning the battle. Another example, suppose one going to a shop and says " Marlboro ": what follows the utterance of the word " Marlboro " is that the shopkeeper walks towards a certain shelf and picks one of the cigarette packets, on which " Marlboro " is written, from the shelf and hands it to me. In this language-game the use of the word " Marlboro " relates us to a defined human action which has been described above.

In such and similar language-games we are always capable of defining a referential relation between a language-game and a human action or mode of activity. Such a referential relation is considerable for every language-game by which the use of a certain word gains a meaning: this referential relation can diagrammatically be indicated as follows;

Language-game |----->Related human action
(use of a word) (mode of activity)

Figure.1

We can also diagrammatically represent the examples given above. Concerning the language-games by which the word " die " and the word " Marlboro " are put to a certain use, the languages or language-games are in relation to two separate human actions;

Language-game |----->Victory(winning the battle)
(use of " die ") (Related human action)

Figure.2

Language-game |----->The walk towards shelf
(use of "Marlboro") (Related human action)

Figure.3

From the above diagrams it becomes clear that a language-game by which a word is put to a certain use is always in a relation to a human action or mode of activity. Though a human action always is in a relation to a form of life, we shall not say more about this relation rather than pointing to it. Returning to our original argument, the relation of a language-game to a related human action, we can say that such a referential relation between them becomes clear from the plainly written words of Wittgenstein; Wittgenstein holds that " the speaking of a language is part of an activity " Ibid §23 (P.11^e). Namely, as soon as we utter a word depending upon the way in which it is used, we refer to a related human action or mode of activity. In the Wittgensteinian sense, there is no a language-game which does not relate us to a human action. For the language or language-game becomes the part of the human activity to which it intentionally refers. So not only definition of language-game but also its actual

occurrence depends on the referential relation between a language-game and a human action. Namely, without a related human action we cannot speak of a language-game. Because a certain word used in a language-game can have a meaning by depending upon that there is a social convention relating our use of the word to a certain human activity. Furthermore the language-game which suggests us a possible meaning for the word used is unified with the human actions. The language-games and human actions constitute a unification by which language-games become definable. The unification of the language-game with the human action clarifies that one cannot be separated from another. This inseparateness is not supposed by definition, but the uses into which words are put makes it clear. To put this in a similar way it can be said that the language-game is included in the related human actions, or language-games have a participation in the human actions. Naturally, the involvement of the language-games in the related human actions clarifies that the language-game and related human action are fused into one another. This is claimed by the idea held by Wittgenstein that the language-games are part of human activities upon which they are inevitably directed. Such a fusion or unification of language-game with the human action describes a dependency of one onto another in terms of its occurrence if to be held that a language-game always refers to a related human action. This view can be explained by an example such that; let us suppose somebody who walks backwards and counting numbers simultaneously. Now the point is that here there is a certain human activity or mode of activity, though it is imaginative, but there is no language-game which relates us to this human activity, in other words there is no use of any word or language into which the above human action is woven. This is because, as one may suppose, there is not a human action of such a kind, simply the described human activity does not exist at all. When a human action of such kind does not exist, it is also impossible to suppose the existence of a related language-game into which the above human action would be woven.

The same kind of analysis of the referential relation between a language-game and a human action can also be conceivable from the side of language-game. Let us consider the supposed word " kima " as a language-game for a special use. If there is no a human action into which this use of the above word as a language-game is woven, then we cannot speak of a language-game. For, if in Wittgensteinian sense a language-game is part of an activity into which it is woven, then the question arises in what way the above example can be thought of as a language-game. For there is no such use of the word " kima " as the language-game suggests. This also clarifies that there is not a related human action to which the use of the word " kima " as a language-game would refer to. Mainly the reason for not accepting this use of the word " kima " as a language-game is the non-existence of a related human action or mode of activity to which it would hold a referential relation.

As far as I can say, beside the referential relation of a language-game to a human action in general, it is also the case that different language-games or uses of one and the same word relates us to different human actions. But a detailed study of such cases, I believe, comprises another independent investigation.

Abbreviation

The following abbreviation is used throughout the whole text in this paper:

PL: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*; the English Text of the Third Edition, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe.

References

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- Wittgenstein, L. 1973 *Philosophical Investigations*: The English Text of the Third Edition, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, Macmillan Publishing: New York.